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DE RUEHUL #0489/01 0510415
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 200415Z FEB 07
FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2948
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2064
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2166
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 7821
RHMFISS/COMUSKOREA J5 SEOUL KOR
RHMFISS/COMUSKOREA J2 SEOUL KOR
RHMFISS/COMUSKOREA SCJS SEOUL KOR
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC//OSD/ISA/EAP//

UNCLAS SEOUL 000489

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KN](#) [KS](#) [PHUM](#) [SCUL](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: PLANS TO COMMEMORATE THE "PYONGYANG REVIVAL" IN
OCTOBER

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (SBU) In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a large number of Protestant Americans came to Korea and found a reception. By 1907, Jang Dae Hyun Church in Pyongyang became the center of what became known as the "Pyongyang Revival," earned it the moniker "Jerusalem of the East." To commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Revival, a group of South Korean Presbyterian pastors is planning a large-scale event in October in Pyongyang to rekindle the previous century's religious awakening, but it is not clear that the DPRK will allow it. END SUMMARY.

REKINDLING THE PYONGYANG RELIGIOUS SPIRIT

[1](#)2. (SBU) A preparatory committee of South Korean Presbyterian pastors, most of whom belong to the International Love Foundation (ILF), is spearheading organizational efforts to send 3,000 South Koreans to a revival ceremony in Pyongyang. Rev. Eom Shin-hyeong, President of the Council of Presbyterian Churches and chair of the preparatory committee, told us that he was coordinating the event with North Korea's Chosun Christian Federation (CCF). Rev. Shin and others went to Kaesong on December 22 to meet with the CCF, and also to Pyongyang on January 13-16. The pastors reported that, despite earlier refusals, the DPRK relented at the last minute and allowed the group to visit the site of the old Jang Dae Hyun Church. They also participated in a service at the DPRK-recognized Chilguk Church.

[1](#)3. (SBU) The pastors were unable to speak to any individual worshippers and left unsure if the North Koreans were truly there for religion or if they had been told to attend by the DPRK, although they commented that numerous "Amens" were heard from the congregation during Shin's sermon at Chilguk. The pastors and CCF agreed that 300 to 500 South Koreans would be invited to a preliminary joint service in March, and 3,000 South Koreans would be invited to join 15,000 North Koreans for a joint service at Chung Ju-yong stadium in Pyongyang in October. The pastors asked CCF to invite ethnic Koreans from other nations, including Korean-Americans, but CCF did not respond. ILF said that it planned to publicize the trip in late February, expressing interest in having American pastors participate in the revival.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Many South Korean Christian organizations are spurning this event. For example, neither the Christian

Council of Korea (CCK) nor the National Council of Christian Churches in Korea (NCCCK), two of the biggest religious organizations in the ROK, will officially participate, though they acknowledged that some of their member churches would. The CCK will not endorse the event, consistent with its refusal to recognize the DPRK. Our CCK contact said the revival was a chance for the DPRK to fill a stadium in a forced public display of religious "freedom," and a chance for the ROKG to claim that reunification efforts were on track, when in reality both claims were propagand. The NCCCK, though it has a more progressive leadership, has decided not to participate because it believes that events would be small-scale, void of religious freedom, and not in the spirit of 1907.

PRICE TAG: ONE CARDIAC CENTER

15. (SBU) Lee Sung-won, Director of the Inter-Korean Social and Cultural Exchanges and Cooperation Team at the ROK Ministry of Unification, said that funding problems may undercut plans for an event in Pyongyang. According to Lee, the organizing committee, during their January visit to the DPRK, promised to build a cardiac hospital, an attractive offer to aging DPRK elites. On their return to Seoul, the pastors asked the Ministry of Unification to fund the hospital. The Ministry refused on the basis that it had not been consulted in advance and that it could not spend so much via one religious group. Lee said that he believes the organizers are currently trying to convince American Mega-Pastor Rick Warren to be the Revival's Keynote Speaker and lead fundraiser.

COMMENT

16. (SBU) Like so many initiatives involving North Korea, the Pyongyang Revival is also stalled because of the need for payoffs to the DPRK leadership. In this case it is a cardiac center. Even if such an event were to take place, it would likely be a staged event for foreign donors rather than a religious event for domestic worshipers. We think it will be some time before Pyongyang is again known as the Jerusalem of the East.
VERSHBOW